

3.7. NORDIC RENAISSANCE IN THE WRITINGS OF HANS FRIEDRICH BLUNCK ILLUSTRATED WITH AN EXAMPLE OF TWO TRILOGIES: DAS WERDENDE VOLK AND DIE VÄTER

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In 1930s there appears a new trend in literature, one which Otto Ernst Hesse described as Nordic renaissance [7, p. 17]. Its aim was to prove that Germans are biologically, spiritually and culturally speaking Nordic-Germanic type. From this assumption a program¹ was formulated which aimed at the creation of the Germanic race cultural movement which would defend Germans from the rush of foreign cultures and develop awareness of being the proper master race. The pseudoscientific theory of German return to Aryan roots formed the basis of Nordic renaissance which caused the birth of literature intending to confirm the Nordic-Germanic theory. Already in 1890s, Alfred Bartels published his radically nationalist and anti-Christian novel «Die Dithmarscher» where he praised Germanic, pagan peasantry. Bartels followers and the spokesmen for Nordic renaissance included: Hans Friedrich Blunck, Moritz Jahn and Will Vesper. They dealt with tribes and ancestors because their aim was to show to the endangered, as they thought, German nation the true, real Nordic heroes. Around 1925, Blunck wrote a novel, a trilogy «Die Urvätersaga» where he relates to Germanic and ancient myths and legends. Will Vesper's novel, «Das harte Geschlecht» takes place around year 1000 in Island and Greenland, Moritz Jahn's one, «Geschichte von den Leuten an der Außenfohrde», most probably in Norway [11, p. 77]. All of these novels are either based on Icelandic peasant stories and legends or imitate them as, the above mentioned writers claimed, they are exceptionally old-Germanic². Blunck, Jahn and Vesper took ethos from these stories maintaining it is typically Germanic and considered the varied Germanic mythology to be ideal for creating new national myths³ and establishing cultural patterns for German society. Nordic renaissance referred directly to Romanticism, however it partly changed its assumptions as far as mythology is concerned⁴ as it could not possibly conceal the Germans' drive to rediscover and identify with the forgotten world of Nordic people.

Hans Friedrich Blunck's⁵ world view can be expounded in great detail with an example of two trilogies: *Das werdende Volk* and *Die Väter*⁶. If one wanted to classify these trilogies, they would fall into historical novel category⁷. The trilogy *Das werdende Volk* includes: *Hein Hoyer, ein Roman von Herren, Hansen und Hagestolzen* from the year 1922, *Berend Fock, die Mär*

vom gottabtrünnigen Schiffer from the year 1923 and *Stelling Rotkinsohn, die Geschichte eines Verkünders seines Volkes* from the year 1924 [3, p. 6]. The last part from the above mentioned, takes place in the 9th century and presents fierce fights of pagan Lower Saxons against tsar's power and Christianity which Charlemagne wanted to impose. The first part is set in the 15th and second in 17th century which means that Blunck does not observe chronological order. The three novels are not linked by any central motif or thematically similar material. The three people, who have nothing in common, are presented by the author in individual way. Lisel Etscheid, the author of the ninth fascicle of magazine called «Mnemosyne». «Arbeiten zur Erforschung von Sprache und Dichtung»⁸, which in 1932 was devoted to Hans Friedrich Blunck⁹, states that the three novels are internally coherent and they lead to another trilogy, namely «Die Väter». It tells the story of the distant past and it can be described as prehistoric novel. «Streit mit den Göttern», «die Geschichte Weland's», «des Fliegers» from the year 1926 is the story from the Bronze Age, while «Kampf der Gestirne» written in the same year from the Stone Age. In the third part «Gewalt über das Feuer» from the year 1928, Blunck reaches to the beginnings of human civilization. Due to this internal coherence and the author's intended chronology in these works one can qualify them as two trilogies [3, p. 6–7].

Hans Friedrich Blunck describes his novel «Stelling Rotkinsohn, die Geschichte eines Verkünders seines Volkes» in the following words: «Those Nordic people – Nordthliudi, as chroniclers called them – at the time when Charlemagne's successor made wars, started to realise peculiar dreams about a new empire. Their teachings sounded like today's words which have never faded and have been here for thousands of years»¹⁰ [2, p. 10].

This novel would give a chance to find out about experiences of the people of Frisian, Icelandic or Greenlandic origin and it would be possible to look at it from ethnological point of view, however the author had different assumptions on his mind. His stories are an interpretation and an appeal to the reader to get to know the history of past ages. Here we deal with conscious manipulation: the nation's past and negative political present are shown in a heroic manner which is intended for the German nation to identify with the now familiarised past and look at the present through its light. The main characters of his historical novels are not famous people, on the contrary – they are very often imaginary characters or ones inspired by folk culture, tales, ballads and stories. As an artist he remained faithful to the ancient motifs and by creating new, but at the same time close to the people, literary works he gave them the works which suited their needs.

In his novels Blunck poses questions concerning human beings and their relation to the past and he seeks the answer to them. He thinks that the knowledge of past times, the people's lifestyle, the ability to understand their way of thinking will make a perfect human being who observes the age-old laws of mankind. Only in this way will the people be able to free themselves from historical burdens and limitations. Blunck, similarly to Herder and Hegel¹¹, perceives history as development which forms the basis for philosophy of not only history but mostly of humanity. A human being can realise their potential and achieve freedom when they create history. According to Blunck human beings are not subjected to history but vice versa because they persistently create it and are in its centre. This the point of view which the writer's historical novels reflect where the main theme is Heimatkunst – regional arts [3, p. 9]. Forrest plays an important role as a mythical world full of demons, enchanted stones, rivers and trees¹².

The northern landscape in «Das werdende Volk» is the area around Dithmarschen and Hamburg. The writer very impressively and vividly demonstrates particular natural phenomena such as the storm over the moor, the fog, dusk, early spring which a man encounters and has to function with¹³. For Blunck the landscape and a human being is one and the Nordic man's attitude to his own land is more direct than in other parts of Europe where people think lightly, merrily and freely and the spirit is detached from nature and from the bond with homeland. He tries to present how strongly Nordic people originate from their own land in physical, emotional and spiritual aspect. The writer had this Nordic sense of life which he tries to show in all possible respects. The multiplicity connected with the region is an important and decisive factor for the essence of his works i.e. human beings. And what are they like? They are internally rich and full of life, however at the same time they are torn by eternal struggle between the earthly and heavenly forces. This is how the eternal warrior comes into existence, a Faustian man, a gothic man, infinitely tormented by dark forces who poses questions concerning the other side, creative power and infinity – the prime cause of existence.

Lisel Etscheid notices that Blunck in his novels tells about the mystery of man who seeks the way to get to his Norse god as closely as possible¹⁴. And it is not the physical but intellectual aspect that is meant here. To achieve this a man must descend from a highly developed culture. And this the basis for the prehistoric trilogy «Die Väter». Unfortunately, this man is often separated from his origin and the relation with God and nature. That is why retrospection on the origins and development of the culture which this man lives in. If new reality is to be built and created, one must begin by observing progress

which can only be achieved by returning to the roots, to the starting point, to the beginning.

Blunck, whose awareness of the existence created the necessity of seeking and the drive to find the cause of existence, presents in both of his trilogies the problem of the existence of God and seeking him as the driving force of the world. All his protagonists: Hein Hoyer, Berend Fock, Stelling Rotkinnsohn, Weland, Ull, Bör look for the path to Norse god, they want to touch him, get to know him, each of them in their own way but none of them proves to be successful. Does it mean that god did not reveal himself to them? Of course, not. He talks to them through nature. Here again the reader faces the natural phenomena such as the storm, bad weather, animals, flowers, morning and evening landscape. This way Blunck demonstrates the beauty, humble surrender and acknowledgement of the eternal law of existence and development which comes from God.

Blunck tries to combine the problem of man's search for God with German mythology. This search for God results from the fact that religion played an important role in the writer's life. It was something firm, unswerving, rooted in human's brain and this is why he treated it really seriously and thought it has a meaning which he did not attempt to explain but he accepted it as a fact. The desire for the artistic presentation of a Nordic man's experiencing God where there exists a strong tension between the drive to knowledge and sensual cognition, lies at the heart of creating of the two trilogies. Pure religion is meant here, as for Blunck all religions are just an attempt to express God's greatness who we have our godlike origin from. One can find elements of various religions in a number of myths and thus in this trilogy «Die Väter», the writer tries to create an extensive mythology and present its origin and development. «Das werdende Volk» exhibits religious problems stemming from evolution. The most important book in this trilogy is «Gewalt über das Feuer», which gives a reason for next ones because it is here that mythology commenced as well as a certain world order is presented.

In both trilogies the main protagonists are deeply believing people who, while looking for their Norse god, accept all related dangers, often with a tragic end. Thanks to his vitality and stamina, Nordic man has no dilemmas. He only knows the longing thanks to which he can transform his life, and the awareness of the change for good makes him able to overcome dangers. Three elements are the most important in his life: religion, nature and woman [3, p. 44]. In all of the six books, the woman occupies a significant role¹⁵. The writer presents us with a number of woman characters from all époques and social classes, however there is one type which is found in every novel,

i.e. a devoted mother with hidden strength. Only thanks to a woman can a man pursue his dangerous path. Her devotion and love give him real power and strength. Two women are godlike characters: Sintgund, a gods' servant who was freed from gods by Weland and Firre who, as a people's companion for better or worse, sent them a male wanderer from heaven. This is how Blunck wanted to underline the godlike origin of a woman. The writer thought that the revival has to come from the North. All the aspirations, however, which the Blunck's Nordic world was to re-awaken, died suddenly in historicism, which deriving from knowledge put emphasis only on historical events, and omitting metaphysical point of view on reality which for the writer constituted an important aspect of the novels.

It appears from this short analysis that these novels do not carry any academic stigma and the people, situations and events are not depicted in the light of modern people but presented as fictional and fantastic tales. Yet, Blunck managed to build the novels in such a way that the reader can identify with these stories and their protagonists. And that is why these novels have become a symbol of the way of thinking and functioning of the people from earlier ages and not of myths or tales [3, p. 15].

The literature of Nordic renaissance was distorted ideology of Nazi Germany. However, when it comes to the works of Hans Fredrich Blunck the opinions differ. Albert Soergel considers his works to be the fight with God and for God, to be the fight with stereotypes and for the archetype of unity. Joseph Nadler thinks that «Die Urvätersaga» trilogy exhibits the spirit and German faith by showing the life of Nordic people and Nordic landscape. Ernst Adolf Dreyer does not wish the writer's works to be treated in a biased way as the artist does not reveal the Nazi dogmas but concentrates on particular human attitudes and decorum [5, p. 176]. Nevertheless, it should be remembered that the evaluation of the above mentioned literary scholars comes from 1930's and 1940's, right after the publication of the trilogies. Today, the knowledge of German history and having the complete Hans Friedrich Blunck's works at our disposal, the reader has greater possibilities of analysis and the right to the writer's personalized assessment.

Notes

1. Tacitus' opinion on Germanic racial purity played an important role in 19th and 20th century racial theories. Alfred Rosenberg, the author of National Socialist racial theories, talked about the danger which can arise from mixing of the races. «Either we upbreed the old blood and thereby find renewed vitality and a heightened will to struggle or the Teutonic European values of culture and ordered government will sink under the filthy human

flood of Cosmopolis. (Münkler, Mity, 2013, p. 131, as cited in A. Rosenberg, «Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts. Eine Wertung des seelisch-geistigen Gestaltungskampfes unserer Zeit, München 1935, p. 309; English translation: Rosenberg, Alfred: «The Myth of the 20th Century». p. 92).

2. However, in reality they are much later literary products.

3. National myths evoke characters from the past to give guarantee for future. They demand the right to interpret the history of the nation but also to structure its course. That leads to responding to two significant challenges: they need to reduce the complexity of the events and adjusting them to ethical and esthetic ideas as well as deprive them of the horror of accidentality, which means overcoming fear that national history is but meaningless episode in the world history. Fulfilling these requirements, national myths build trust and faith in nation's ability to control great and ... future [8, p. 25].

4. An important Romantic work concerning mythology was «Philosophie der Mythologie» by Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling where the author states: [...]mythology is completely genuine i.e. it must be understood in the way it tells the story and not in the way as something different was thought and another thing was said. Mythology is not allegorical, it is tautological [12, p. 50]. As it is known, a part of the writers in the first half of the 20th century skillfully annexed the content and elements from various fields of art, history, daily life and subjected them to their own perspective, often conforming to ideological assumptions.

5. Hans Friedrich Blunck (1888-1961) was a representative of Low German folk art, where he strove to present the influence of different conditions on man and his uniformity with the world drawing inspiration from folk poems, ballads, legends and tales [2, p. 175]. His political activity as the Head of Reichsschrifttumskammer as well as received honours provide evidence of his support for Nazi regime [6, p. 64].

6. This is the trilogy which was later entitled «Die Urvätersaga». It is Blunck's most popular literary work which catches interest even today.

7. Historical novel has a number of definitions. Based on the Petra Gallmeister's article, «Der historische Roman», the writer sets historical events in the personally planned plot, shaping the character's lives by means of figures of speech. Historical novel operates on two time planes: it shows the past époque, reflecting upon the problems of the times in which they were created and presents the present conflicts of the author. The reader may ask a question about the conformity of the past events with reality [4, p. 160]. It should be remembered that the sources of historical novel as a syncretic genre are

not only other written works, such as chronicles, memoirs or diaries but also fairy tales and legends taken from folk tradition [1, p. 429].

8. The magazine was edited by Austrian literary scholar Oskar Walzer and published by Ludwig Röhrscheid Verlag in Bonn.

9. The fascicle was entitled «Das Gotterlebnis des germanischen Menschen». Weltanschauliches in der Dichtung von Hans Fr. Blunck.

10. Bei jenen Nordleuten – Nordthliudi, wie die Chronisten sie nennen – sind Nun um die Zeit, als Kaiser Karls Nachfolger sich bekriegten, sonderbare Trämer eines neuen Reichs aufgestanden. Ihre Lehren klingen wie Worte von heute, sie sind vielleicht auch nie in uns erloschen und waren doch schon vor tausend Jahren.

11. According to Hegel every nation has their own gods living in folk traditions which while told throughout the ages inspire imagination and thus are preserved [8, p. 33].

12. This was how the difference between the Germanic and Romance peoples was to be shown. As early as Tacitus, who in his work «Germania» from about the year 98 wrote about dense forests of Germania which constituted original source of Germanic customs. In later years the Germans relationship with forests was treated almost literally as it demonstrated their courage and defense abilities [8, p. 132 – 133]. Heinrich von Treitschke, a 19th century German historian, in his work «Deutsche Geschichte in Neunzehnten Jahrhundert», writes about the closeness of Germanic people to gods, forests and fields which gave them the feeling of freedom and built the will to live [8, p. 93]. Since the second half of the 19th century the image of forest has been given political content. The proclaimed by ideologists strength and simplicity of the forest peoples was interpreted as the requirement of preserving pure race among European nations. The analogy between the German nation and its forests turned the people inhabiting forests into social model example [9, p. 680–691].

13. Schelling claimed that mythology is a common fact, important for all humankind and for particular nations, moreover, myths conceal universal values are essential for teaching children. According to him myths repetition, singing old songs once again re-incorporates us in natural order. The same chorus can be heard in high and low tides, in heart beats and finally in a movable series of religious performances [10, p. 11-12]. Mythology is therefore, the narration of culture which Blunck's works confirm.

14. In the article there are two spellings: God and god. It is due to the fact that Norse god signifies a being from polytheistic beliefs, from mythology, God, however, is a supernatural being from monotheistic religions.

15. The depiction of a woman in German myth played an big part. For a German woman death is more important than losing honour. «In mythical picture of the Germans it is them who face men with an alternative _victory or doom‘ and they eliminate the possibility of escape or surrender» [8, p. 133].

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